



**Testimony: Jennifer Alexander, Acting CEO for ConnCAN**

*Education Committee - Friday, March 15, 2013*

My name is Jennifer Alexander and I am the Acting CEO for the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now (ConnCAN), a statewide advocacy organization focused on ensuring that every child in Connecticut has access to a high-quality public education.

I want to thank Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the committee for the opportunity to provide testimony on four separate pieces of legislation: Senate Bill 1097, An Act Concerning Revisions to the Education Reform Act of 2012; House Bill 6622, An Act Concerning District Partnerships; Senate Bill 1098, An Act Concerning the Education Cost-Sharing Formula; and House Bill 6624, An Act Concerning Minor Revisions to the Education Statutes.

**S.B. 1097: An Act Concerning Revisions to the Education Reform Act of 2012**

Last year, Governor Dannel P. Malloy signed a landmark education reform law (Public Act 12-116). A key pillar of the education reform law was raising standards for educators by implementing a teacher and principal evaluation program.

Providing regular feedback and support, based in part on student outcomes, is a core responsibility of our schools and districts. The state's educator evaluation program (SEED) is a fundamental step needed to provide feedback and support to further empower high-performing teachers and principals, make certain that low-performing teachers get the help they need, and allow for swift dismissal of those who consistently fail to improve. Last year's law required the SEED program to launch in 8-10 sites across Connecticut as part of last year's education reform law.

The pilot is now underway in 10 sites across Connecticut, and the educator evaluation model was recently given the go-ahead for statewide implementation by the State Board of Education to be phased in gradually over the next school year. This phase-in will allow schools and districts to prepare for full implementation set for 2014-15. The State Board-approved implementation plan was developed by consensus of the state's Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (PEAC). The PEAC represents major stakeholders responsible for implementation of the evaluation program—from teachers unions to principals to school boards to superintendents.

Timely implementation of this statewide educator evaluator program is an essential step toward ensuring that children across Connecticut have access to the best teachers and principals.

S.B. 1097 must be rejected because it aims to unnecessarily delay implementation of the statewide educator evaluation system.

S.B. 1097 also removes implementation authority from boards of education and gives it to a "professional development and evaluation committee." Ultimately, school boards are held accountable

for and are responsible for implementation of this program and corresponding results. In order to do this effectively, they must retain final decision making authority.

S.B. 1097 would also delay the implementation timeline of the new system by one year, and require all school districts to fully implement the model in the 2014-15 school year. This overrides the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (PEAC) and the State Board of Education's (SBE) decision to phase-in the model gradually starting next year.

I have observed every public PEAC meeting for the last two years. All members of the PEAC approved the SEED model and its implementation plan. What's more, all 26 members of the Education Committee voted in favor of last year's landmark education reform law, which included the creation of the educator evaluator program. And public opinion is clearly in support of enhancing teacher quality this year. In fact, a recent Global Strategy Group poll of more than 600 Connecticut voters found that nearly three-fourths of voters (73 percent) believe that "evaluating teachers based on class performance" should be a priority for the governor and state legislators this year.

We owe it to our kids to stop delaying action. We owe it to our students to move forward with the new educator evaluation program. We cannot dial back our efforts to ensure great teachers, principals, and public schools for every child -- in a timely manner.

**I strongly urge members of the Education Committee to reject S.B. 1097** and to follow through on the promises made to our kids in last year's landmark education reform law, including the new teacher and principal evaluator program.

#### **H.B. 6622: An Act Concerning District Partnerships**

In order to support the growth of high quality public school options in Connecticut, we need to promote collaborative efforts between high quality public schools of choice and their host districts. Instead of creating parallel systems within public education, the state must find ways to encourage districts to incorporate high quality options for their students into the current system.

H.B. 6622 can help accomplish this by extending and making permanent a district/charter collaboration option. If passed and signed into law, the bill would extend an existing pilot program that allows public charters to enter into agreements with their host districts to collaborate around data and funding. Under these agreements, districts can include charter school student performance data in their overall performance data (the State Department of Education's calculation of the District Performance Index). In return, the charter school can receive assistance from the district, like per student operating, facilities funding, the use of district-provided facilities, or assistance with renovation and facilities improvement efforts.<sup>1</sup> These arrangements help ensure that charter students are funding more equitably compared to district public schools students. Furthermore, H.B. 662 would also extend the program beyond the current pilot districts (Bridgeport, Hartford, and New Haven) to include all of the Alliance Districts. Without this bill, the pilot program will sunset this year.

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<sup>1</sup> Achievement First Hartford Academy 2010-2011 Annual Report to the Connecticut State Department of Education (p.28)  
[http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/equity/charter/reports/af\\_hartford\\_ar.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/equity/charter/reports/af_hartford_ar.pdf).

Right now, this option is working in Hartford, where the Hartford Public Schools and Achievement First Hartford Academy have negotiated a District-Charter Collaboration Compact. Partnerships like these give districts a stake in the success of their charter schools, which drives them to support and sustain those schools as they would any other public school in their district.

All of our students deserve a great education, regardless of the type of school they attend. If we are serious about closing our worst-in-the-nation achievement gap, we have a responsibility to our kids to support schools that are delivering results. This legislation supports this goal, and enhances the collaborative efforts between public charter schools and their host districts.

#### **S.B. 1098: An Act Concerning the Education Cost-Sharing Formula**

Connecticut's Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula, which allocates over \$2 billion a year, relies on outdated research and has been altered more than two dozen times. The resulting formula does an incredibly poor job of fairly serving all of Connecticut's students.

Connecticut needs a comprehensive overhaul of school finance that fairly funds all public school students based on their learning needs, including children who attend public schools of choice.

Unfortunately, S.B. 1098 commissions yet another study on the issue of school funding -- an issue that the state has studied several times over the past few decades, including with a recent study by the ECS Task Force.

Enough is enough. It's time we start acting on the creation of a new funding formula that funds all students fairly at the public schools they attend -- our kids are counting on us to do more than commission yet another study. It's time to start fixing the problem.

#### **H.B. 6624: An Act Concerning Minor Revisions to the Education Statutes**

Transparency is one of the most critical pieces to reforming education, and ConnCAN applauds the Committee for its previous work in building a longitudinal data system to gather and study student achievement.

We support H.B. 6624 because it's critical that the state captures data surrounding public education in a comprehensive way, and over a long period of time.

We also support expanding the definition of a school course credit to include a demonstration of competency in a particular subject area. It is crucial that a student's advancement through his or her career be based on ability to master and apply skills and content and not to have progress focused purely on seat time in the classroom.

This change is an important first step in moving towards an individualized approach to education, with tailored curriculum to suit each student's learning needs.